



Healthy and Connected Member Newsletter - October 2026

Healthy and Connected is the South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services' (SCDHHS) member e-newsletter. Healthy and Connected features tips and tools to help you and your loved ones connect to resources and live healthier lives.



Emergency Department Versus Urgent Care

When you or your child has an injury that needs medical attention, it's important to act fast. Maybe they fell off the monkey bars. Maybe you twisted your ankle while doing yardwork. But where is the [best place to go](#)? Urgent care or the emergency room?

An emergency department treats life- or limb-threatening illnesses or injuries. This is the best choice for someone of any age who needs attention quickly.

They are open 24/7 with a team that has access to providers with advanced specialties. Examples of reasons to go to an emergency department:

- Chest pain/pressure
- Head injuries
- Compound bone fracture
- Pneumonia
- Seizures
- Severe abdominal pain
- Shortness of breath
- Uncontrolled bleeding

- Sudden severe headache
- Paralysis or weakness

Urgent care is a type of middle ground between your primary care doctor and the emergency room. If you have an issue that can't wait, urgent care is the better option. It normally has set hours and a list of ailments that can be treated. Urgent cares tend to have shorter wait times than emergency departments. Some reasons to go to an urgent care include:

- Cuts and minor burns
- Diarrhea
- Earache
- Joint pain/sprains
- Urinary tract infections
- Vomiting

Always call 911 if you have trouble breathing, a life-threatening injury or signs of a stroke or heart attack.

Managed Care Organizations' Annual Star Rating

Healthy Connections Medicaid has five managed care organizations (MCOs). An MCO is a healthcare company, also called a health plan. They cover a variety of providers like doctors, hospitals and specialists to meet Medicaid members' health needs. Most members may choose to enroll in one of the five MCOs. The options are:

- Absolute Total Care
- Healthy Blue by BlueChoice of South Carolina
- Molina Healthcare of South Carolina
- First Choice by Select Health
- Humana Healthy Horizons in South Carolina

Each MCO is different. Members can choose which one is best for their own health needs.

All MCOs are reviewed each year by the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA). The NCQA grades health plans on the quality of care patients receive. They also rate how happy patients are with their care. All factors go into the final scores. The 2026 ratings are listed below:

MCO		Star Rating				
Absolute Total Care	3.5	★	★	★	★	★
BlueChoice	4	★	★	★	★	★
Humana	3.5	★	★	★	★	★
Molina	3.5	★	★	★	★	★
Select Health	3.5	★	★	★	★	★

Read more about MCO coverage at [SCChoices.com](https://www.sccchoices.com).

Being Aware of Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities (LDs) are disorders that affect how a person's brain takes in and uses information. They can involve verbal or nonverbal information. They can also range from mild to severe. LDs normally impact the way someone writes, reads and/or does math.

The biggest sign of an LD is when there is a difference between a child's academic potential versus their performance. A parent might notice signs of LDs when their child is young. But usually, a parent or teacher doesn't notice mild or moderate LDs until their child goes to school. This is when challenges in their work appear. Each type of LD has different signs. [These could include](#) difficulties with:

- Identifying letters, numbers, colors and/or math symbols
- Counting
- Expanding vocabulary
- Rhyming
- Sounding out words
- Organizing, starting and/or completing tasks
- Organizing thoughts to express what they want to say
- Long- or short-term memory

- Holding a pencil correctly
- Handwriting legibility
- Retelling a story in the right order
- Staying on task
- Following directions
- Coordination

These signs alone are not enough to know if your child has an LD. It must be diagnosed by a professional. October is Learning Disabilities Awareness Month. If you think your child may have an LD, [bring it up](#) to their teacher. Most schools have a team that works with families to look at and help fix issues related to school performance.

Tobacco Cessation Help

November is Lung Cancer Awareness Month. It is a great time to learn about protecting your lungs. In South Carolina, [lung cancer is the top cause of cancer deaths](#). Our state also has higher rates of lung cancer than most of the United States.



Smoking cigarettes is the main cause of lung cancer. Tobacco smoke has thousands of chemicals that harm your lung cells over time.

[Vaping and e-cigarettes](#) also carry real health risks. Vape liquids often contain nicotine, heavy metals and chemicals that can hurt your lungs. Health experts warn that breathing these substances into your lungs can cause long-term harm.

Quitting tobacco and vaping at any age lowers your risk of lung cancer. It gives your lungs a chance to heal too.

If you want to stop using tobacco or vapes, [South Carolina Healthy Connections Medicaid](#) covers tools to help you succeed. You can enroll in free quit support with the [SC Tobacco Quitline](#).

As a Medicaid member you get coverage for:

- All seven [Federal Drug Administration \(FDA\)-approved](#) quit medications. There is no copay and no prior authorization needed. This includes over-the-counter options like nicotine patches, gum and lozenges, as well as prescription medication.
- Face-to-face tobacco cessation counseling sessions with a doctor or health provider. They can help to build a personal quit plan.
- Free, 24/7 support. This can be through phone or online coaching. When you enroll, you can get a free starter kit of nicotine replacement therapy delivered to your door.

You do not have to quit alone. Get help with these free programs today.

- South Carolina Tobacco Quitline: Call (800) 784-8669 or text “READY” 21586 for free coaching and quit support.
- [Live Vape Free](#): Teens and young adults ages 13 to 26 can get free, confidential text support to quit vaping by texting “VAPEFREE” to 873373.

Talk with your doctor or pharmacist on your next visit about ways to quit tobacco for good.

Coping With Infant Loss

Infant loss can be one of the hardest life events a person or family can face. If you or someone you care about is grieving after a loss, you are not alone.

According to [the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), seven or eight out of every 1,000 babies born in South Carolina do not make it to their first birthday. These deaths are most often due to premature birth, low birth weight, birth defects and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

October is Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month. Grief takes time. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Sadness, anger, guilt, anxiety or numbness are common.

Below are a few ways to [take care of yourself](#) during this tough time.

- Give yourself permission to grieve. Allow yourself to feel whatever emotions come up without judgement.
 - Find ways to remember and honor your baby. Some families plant a small tree. You can also make a keepsake box or hold a private family memorial.
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- Talk about your feelings. Sharing your thoughts with a friend, family member or mental health expert can help you deal with the weight of grief.
- Take care of your physical and mental health. Try to rest when you can. Make sure to eat healthy food and take short walks if you feel up to it.

Healthy Connections Medicaid members have access to support to help you through this hard time.

- [Healthy Connections Medicaid](#) covers mental health counseling and therapy services. Talking with a counselor can provide a safe space to talk about your grief.
- Recovery after pregnancy loss or delivery is important. Your Medicaid coverage includes doctor visits to monitor your physical healing and recovery for up to 12 months after delivery.
- Local organizations across the state offer support for families facing loss. Programs like the [South Carolina Infant Mental Health Association](#) and local hospital grief support groups can connect you with resources nearby.
- The National Maternal Health Hotline offers 24/7 crisis support. Call or text (833) 852-6262. It is free and confidential. You can also call or text 988 any time to reach the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

To find out more about help available to you, speak with your primary care provider.

Managing Holiday Stress and Anxiety



The holidays are meant to be a time for family, food and fun. But for many, this time of the year can bring extra stress and anxiety. From busy schedules and financial strain to family gatherings, feeling overwhelmed this time of year is common.

To help manage your anxiety, try [these simple tips](#).

- Practice the 4-4-4 box breath. When your heart starts racing, stop and take a break. Breathe in through your nose for four seconds, hold it for four seconds and blow it out slowly for four seconds.
- Use the 5-4-3-2-1 method. Name five things you see, four things you can touch, three things you can hear, two things you smell and one thing you taste to return to the current moment.
- Stick to your normal routine. Try to go to bed and wake up at your usual times. Skipping sleep or missing meals can quickly make anxiety feel much worse.
- Get outside for 15 minutes. A short walk around the neighborhood can clear your head. Fresh air and sunlight help boost your mood naturally.
- Break tasks into small steps. Don't try to clean the whole house or do all your shopping in one day. Pick two small things to do each day so you don't feel rushed.
- Talk to a friend. Sharing how you feel with someone you trust can instantly make your worries feel smaller.

Anxiety and stress affect everyone at some point in life. At-home tips can help but sometimes it can get too heavy to handle on your own. You should [reach out to a doctor](#) if:

- Anxiety feels difficult to control.
- It's affecting your sleep, focus or physical health.
- You're avoiding things you used to enjoy doing, especially around the holidays.
- You feel hopeless or unable to cope.

If you need extra help, remember South Carolina Healthy Connections Medicaid coverage includes mental health care. You can visit a family doctor or talk to a counselor. To find a doctor near you, check covered services or talk to someone about your benefits, visit the [South Carolina Healthy Connections website](#) or call the Member Contact Center at (888) 549-0820. It is open Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Updated Notice of Privacy Practices

The South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services recently updated its Notice of Privacy Practices. You can view the updated Notice of Privacy Practices in the link below.

If you have any questions about this update or how your personal information is handled, please call the Healthy Connections Medicaid Member Contact Center at (888) 549-0820. It is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Notice of Privacy Practices

Thank you for reading Healthy and Connected. Follow SCDHHS on our [Facebook](#) and [X](#) pages for regular updates. You can also [view the Medicaid Member Handbook](#) on SCDHHS' [website](#) to learn more about what is covered, where to go to ask questions and more.